

THE
GLOVEMAKER'S
WAR

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For Violet and Beatrix

“What the heart has once owned and had, it shall never lose.”

Henry Ward Beecher

PROLOGUE

*I*t was time to go. The Allied invasion of France had begun, and Luc would join his comrades in the Resistance at daybreak in the nearby mountains. Through the only window of the hideaway, he could see the fading moon low in the sky. Pale and watery, it sneaked out intermittently from behind the drifting clouds, casting strange shadows on the floor of the barn. In the darkness of the outbuilding, the animals were slowly waking one by one, stirred by a circadian rhythm over which they had no control. Running his finger over Eve's cheek, he kissed her gently and breathed in her essence, trying to preserve her in his memory forever. She smiled in her sleep and touched his arm. He felt for his clothes on the floor and wrestled on his torn pants, then yanked a ragged sweater over his head. He had never felt such heartache. He wanted to stay in the safe house with her forever, but it was his duty to fight for his country.

He crept quietly across the barn to where he could make out Eve's leather bag in the muddy light. He knew it was where she kept her glove form and glove-making supplies—the contrivances of her disguise as a courier for the Resistance. He rummaged for the rose-colored gloves that she'd made for

herself and treasured so much. He pressed one against his cheek, before tucking it close to his heart in the top pocket of his jacket. Then he found the glove form and brushing his lips across the crumpled paper on which he'd written a message the night before, he pushed the note deep inside a hollow finger of the metal mold.

Overcome with emotion, he stumbled to the door and opened it. Tears trickled down his cheeks and he wiped them on his rough jacket sleeve. The misty gloom of the early morning enveloped him, and without looking back, he was gone.

CHAPTER 1

GEORGINA
Manhattan, 2016

It was late April in the Northeast, when dandelion clocks are known to fly, but wintry puffs were blowing around instead. Georgina leaned her head back, letting the icy flakes land on her eyelids and tickle her nose, wondering how something so beautiful and silent could cause so much chaos. The snow had been falling steadily for a couple of hours, the brashness and hubbub of the city's streets temporarily muffled under a feathery white eiderdown. Cars glided like slow-moving igloos, their tires skidding on the slushy surface, while shoppers in heavy boots and thick parkas lumbered between frosty hillocks dumped on the sidewalks. Georgina, however, had no intention of walking anywhere. An eager cabbie spotted her jubilant wave and quickly veered across two lanes of traffic, his car snaking from side to side, throwing up sheets of sleet in its wake. It took some time, but the indomitable New Yorker prevailed, prodded by an authority that the wealthy always seem to command.

“The Plaza Grand on Lexington, please.”

The driver turned to look at her, breathing in the luxuriousness of her perfume. “For you, I’d drive to the end of the earth,” he thought. He set off again, down 5th Avenue, like a fearless knight battling with cars to his left and to his right.

Enveloped in the warmth of the taxi, Georgina hugged herself. The risky chauffeuring and muted mayhem outside her window didn’t faze her. It was an entirely perfect day. Her cheeks glowed with excitement, almost matching the delicate pink of her beanie hat and leather gloves. Visions of a victory celebration popped into her head. “Yes, I’ll have a party at that new nightclub that Scarlett told me about. I deserve it.”

Her presentation to investors had gone very well. Enlisting her friends’ expertise had yielded dividends. Lily, who headed up a creative agency, had helped her with the pitch deck, and Jen had agreed to merchandise the product. The investors loved that Jen’s cool cosmetics company donated proceeds of sales to environmental and social causes. Georgina’s concept of a quinoa facial scrub, discovered on a trip to Peru, was now on track to becoming a retail reality.

After a slow journey across town, the cab pulled up in front of the hotel. The doorman slid out into the street to open the passenger door.

“Welcome home, Miss Smytheson. Nice weather for polar bears!”

“I love it, George. The city has a dreamlike quality today. Are you feeling better?”

“All the better for seeing you. If all our guests were like you, my job would be a breeze.”

“I’ve been worried about you.”

“Just had a wisdom tooth removed, that’s all.”

She reached into her bag for the box of Krispy Kreme donuts that she’d bought on her way to the presentation.

“For you. I know they’re your favorite.”

“I can’t believe you remembered! You’re the best. I’ll have

to eat them before I get home, though. The wife has me on a low-carb diet.”

“It’s our little secret,” she smiled.

A gust of heat hit them as he opened the door to the lobby, ushering her inside with an exaggerated flourish. Georgina swept past him into the hotel, the heels of her boots clicking on the polished marble floor toward the penthouse elevator. Removing her hat with one hand, she punched her special code into the keypad with the other. The doors purred as they welcomed her in, then closed behind her, sealing her privilege. After a brief ride, they opened again onto the small hallway of the suite where she lived with her mother.

She shrugged off her fur-trimmed puffer coat and threw it carelessly on the entry table. Settling into a plush, upholstered armchair, she peeled off a rose-colored kid-glove finger by finger and, marveling at the softness of the leather, brushed it against her cheek. Gloves had always been her weakness, something her mother had never understood. She tilted her head to one side as she ran her fingers through her highlighted hair, crossing her long legs at the ankles. Looking down, she was dismayed to see salt stains on the fine Italian leather of her boots.

Her view of the Manhattan skyline from high up on the sixty-third floor was usually marvelous, the colors of the sky constantly changing, shifting, casting kaleidoscopic shapes and shadows on the building opposite. But today, dense, snow-filled clouds hovered near the windows, blocking out all possibilities of wonder. She wasn’t going to let that spoil her joy. Her mother was away; she had the apartment to herself. Perhaps Marco would stop by later to help her celebrate. Just thinking of him made her shiver with desire.



The hotel had been Georgina's home since her parents' divorce eighteen years ago. Her mother, Angela Harrison, was from a French-British family in England and had met Georgina's father, Charles Smytheson III, at a dinner party in London in the late '70s. He was in the wine business, passing through London on his way back to New York after a tasting tour of Burgundy, and Angela worked as a bilingual secretary for the prestigious wine dealers Bailey Brothers and Walker. The hostess cleverly sat them beside each other; he dazzled her with exotic travel stories, while she won him over with her European charm. By the end of the meal, they'd fallen in love. He swept her away to his apartment on Central Park West with promises of a thrilling life in America.

But the glamour of their Manhattan lifestyle faded when Georgina was born. Mothering, Angela discovered, was not her strong suit. They enrolled Georgina in a boarding school in England, believing she'd have more companionship there and the discipline they'd neither the time nor the inclination to provide. Lonely without her daughter for company, Angela became unhappy with a husband who was always away. She was curious as to why Charles spent so much time traveling. She did a bit of snooping and discovered an affair. It was the end of their marriage. Charles, feeling guilty for his infidelity to both his wife and daughter and needing to move on to his new life with a clear conscience, set up generous trust funds in both their names.

Charles now lived on his vineyard in Oregon with a much younger wife called Petra and their son, Ben. Georgina rarely heard from him these days. There was the odd phone call, hastily made from airports, always when he was traveling alone, out of earshot of his new family. Georgina felt like a snapshot in a photo album, to be shelved away and only taken out to look at in nostalgic moments.

She recognized that she was the product of her father's guilt-money. Although she enjoyed partying and trips to

Aspen or the Hamptons with her high-flying friends, she didn't buy into her mother's lifestyle of constant holiday. She'd glimpsed inside Angela's hollow shell and decided she needed more. She liked to work to keep herself busy and feel some semblance of self-worth. This new business venture was important to her: it could mean independence.

Her cell phone vibrated from the depths of her bag. Rummaging for a few seconds, she pulled it out, peered at the message on the screen, and groaned, tossing it back. Her mum was probably freaking out about her summer Hamptons rental and wanted Georgina to call the realtor to check that the deposit went through. While on a cruise in the Mediterranean, she was already thinking about her next trip, her next "bit of fun." Even when Georgina was alone, her mother could still suffocate her with her vanity.

She couldn't deal with these shenanigans now. She needed a drink.



The lounge was Georgina's favorite room in the hotel. Ornamental trees lined the cavernous space, their sparkly lights reflecting in the highly polished floors and evoking an ambiance of perpetual Christmas. She spotted him in deep conversation with an attractive woman dressed in a slick fitted suit, seated on a leather bar stool. They were leaning into each other as if their exchange was for their ears only. Then the shrill of the businesswoman's laughter rose above the buzz of conversation in the room; she touched Marco's arm and looked up at him, her smile dazzling in the shiny atmosphere. Georgina shrank behind an oversized arrangement of purple lilacs, letting the heady scent of spring waft over her, and stumbled towards an empty seat, trying to understand what she'd just witnessed.

He appeared silently at her side, his discreet cough

interrupting her thoughts. He carried a silver tray, balancing a pink cocktail glass, which he placed on the table beside her. Reaching for the drink, Georgina removed the slice of lime, accidentally brushing his hand as she did so. She blushed slightly, remembering where she liked him to touch her.

"How did you know I was here?" she asked him. She took a sip of the perfectly chilled Cosmopolitan, her blue eyes wide and questioning.

"I always know when you're around," he whispered. His lips turned up at the corners, his eyes twinkling, as he bowed with a flourish and backed away. As Marco returned to the bar, she noted how his buttocks moved in his tight black pants. She loved the thrill their clandestine hook-ups and flirtatious exchanges gave her, but right now suspicious thoughts had taken over her usual carefree disposition.

The text message she'd ignored earlier flashed again on the screen. She sighed and read it: "*Grandy isn't well. Got message from her doctor to say that she's asking for me. You'll have to go. I'm sure you'll manage until I get back. Will call in a few days to see how you're getting on. Mum X.*"

It wasn't the message Georgina had been expecting at all. She hadn't seen her grandmother for years. She was concerned her mother assumed she would take care of everything. But the fact that she didn't want to cut short her cruise for her sick mother only highlighted the selfishness that Georgina had come to expect. As a child, Georgina had rarely seen her mother when she was away at boarding school. Angela had always been too busy to visit, even for important events. When she was eleven Georgina had learned to cover up her disappointment with bravado, but the painful memory that she'd long since tried to forget, now came to mind. That year she'd won a prize for 'Most Improved' in her class. Thrilled, she'd written to her mother to tell her the prize was to be given out on Speech Day and that she really wanted her to be there. But Angela let her down, her excuse being that she had a critical

meeting to attend. Instead, it was her grandmother who sat proudly in the audience as Georgina went up to receive the engraved silver cup.

As Georgina sipped her cocktail, a picture of a gentle, dark-haired woman floated into her mind. She remembered that her grandmother had always been the one to visit, before their get-togethers ended unexpectedly. With no explanation at all, her mum had one day ordered the school not to allow meetings between grandmother and granddaughter. It was as if she'd wanted to erase their English history from their lives. Her grandmother had continued to phone her though. Even if it was a tenuous relationship, it had been better than nothing.

But she couldn't recall when she'd last spoken with Grandy. Communication was tricky, especially with an old lady who went to bed a seven o'clock in the evening on the other side of the Atlantic. It must have been at least fifteen years since they'd last met. That the doctor had been in contact left her feeling uneasy. There had to be something very seriously wrong with her grandmother for her mum to make this unusual request.

Georgina let out a sigh. "Oh, but it's such bad timing," she thought. She felt her phone vibrate again. It was a message from her friend Tilly, asking if she wanted to join her at the opening of a new nightclub that night. Tilly, an influencer who was being paid to feature the club on her Facebook page, needed as many high rollers to attend as possible. Georgina wrestled with the pros and cons in her head before reluctantly shooting her friend a quick text: "*Thanks but can't. Off to London.*" She then pressed the British Airways app on her phone to check on the flight times. There was one leaving Kennedy at nine-thirty that night, which would get her into Heathrow the following morning. There were just two seats left in First Class. She took a deep breath, then clicked "Book." Her mother would have to pay her back later if she couldn't be bothered to interrupt her holiday.

"I haven't been to London or seen Camilla for ages. And when I've made sure Grandy is okay, I could check out that branding agency that Lily recommended, too," she thought.

She glanced down at her watch, its diamonds glistening back at her. It was two o'clock in the afternoon: she had plenty of time to get packed and be at the airport by seven-thirty. She waved over to Marco, signaling for another drink. He winked at her as he set down the pink cocktail on her side table, together with a small bowl of edamame.

"How did the meeting go this morning?" he asked softly.

"It was great. Would you like to help me celebrate now? I won't be able to see you later tonight—I have to fly to London. My grandmother isn't well." Popping a salty bean into her mouth, she ran the tip of her tongue over her glossy lips and smiled up at him with hungry eyes.



As they lounged on the king-sized bed, she rolled over onto her stomach and twisted the sheet around her naked body, balancing her head on her hand.

"Who was that I saw you chatting to earlier?" she asked.

"It was Luisa Rivera, the editor from First Time Publishing. She was in the hotel for a conference. She just stopped by the bar to tell me that they like my manuscript. You remember, I told you about the new publishing company that's specializing in Hispanic writers."

"Oh, that's who she was. She's hot." Georgina gulped. "That's amazing. Good for you."

Marco ruffled her hair. "You've turned quite green! Do you think I have something going on with her?"

"You know I'm not the jealous type." She punched his arm. "You're a free agent."

"Well, she was very interested in me, I'll have you know, but not like you're thinking. This is the break I need. Now, tell

me what happened with your pitch?"

"They weren't interested at first. They said the market was flooded with eco-friendly products like mine, but then I reeled them in with the connection I have with Jen's new sustainable cosmetics company. They loved the social and environmental component." She flashed a self-satisfied smile. "It was like an episode of Shark Tank."

"Well done, you! How long will you be away?" he asked, nuzzling his nose into her hair. She could feel his warm breath on her neck as she leaned back into him.

"I have no idea. I guess until my mother finishes her cruise, which isn't for another two weeks. I have so much to do with my new project, but I really have to go."

"Well, I hope you'll be back for my sister's birthday in May. She's planning a party and my mother wants to meet you."

Georgina swallowed hard as she pushed herself away from him. She sat upright against the pillows, pulling up the sheet to cover herself before folding her arms across her body. "I don't think that's a good idea," she said slowly. "Don't you like things the way they are? Introducing me to your family is just going to complicate everything." Something her friend Scarlett said kept rattling around in her head: "Look, it's OK to shag him. But don't let things get too serious. The minute he suggests meeting his family, run the other way. He'll be proposing next and cashing in big time. Cha-ching!" She didn't know whether to believe that he was after her money. She was far more uneasy about another word, which began with a capital C: Commitment. She liked things the way they were. Marriage was simply not on her radar.

She couldn't help but stare at Marco as he got out of bed. At thirty-four, his thick black hair was lightly peppered with gray, and early-morning workouts had honed his naturally toned physique. He bent down to reach for his pants.

"Why does it always come to this with you? What are you scared of? You think the idea of introducing me to your friends

as a writer is cool, but whenever I suggest meeting my family, you get cold feet. This isn't the first time. You're pathetic. You live in your posh hotel and me in a walk-up in the Bronx with my mother. I get it. It's not going to work, is it?"

He shrugged on the jacket of his waiter's uniform. "I've got work to do."

Georgina saw something in his handsome face that she'd never seen before. His soft brown eyes, which usually sparkled at her, now flashed in anger.

"I don't know what you're saying. You know I've never thought of you like that. I love being with you. My friends really like you too. Why do we have to take things to another level when they're great as they are? We've never argued before. Let's not do this just before I leave."

"We've never argued before because, if you haven't noticed, we always do things your way. I can't do this anymore. Have fun in London." He looked back at her as he opened the door. "And you're right, Luisa is hot."



Later that evening, the snow was collecting in drifts as quickly as it was being cleared.

"Can't you go any faster?" Georgina shouted to the driver from the back seat of her limousine.

"Sorry, Miss, but we're not going anywhere right now." He took his hands off the steering wheel, throwing them up in the air in frustration. Georgina clicked the airline app on her phone. Her flight number popped up automatically, indicating that it was delayed.

"Well, it doesn't matter."

Sinking her head further back into the softness of her seat, she closed her eyes, her mind drifting back to a few hours earlier. She could hear an echo of Marco's sexy voice murmuring to her, remembering how his touch had made her

quiver with pleasure. She shivered. Their parting was strained and angry; she didn't want to hurt him, but he'd hurt her too. She simply liked things the way they were, but he'd gone and ruined that.

It was eight-thirty when they finally reached the airport terminal, almost an hour later than the recommended check-in time.

The clerk glanced at Georgina's passport.

"Good evening, Miss Smytheson. I'm afraid your flight is delayed due to the weather, and we're not sure at this time when it'll be leaving. Please wait in the lounge until you hear any announcements."

As a well-heeled traveler, Georgina had her routine: passing through the specially designated security lane, she went straight for Duty-Free to pick up some of her favorite make-up and perfume. She then made her way to the first-class lounge, thinking that she would find a quiet booth to have dinner; but her plans were thwarted. The lounge was overflowing with anxious passengers scrutinizing the silent scene outside the vast picture windows of the terminal. Georgina realized that there was no point in worrying. She was lucky to find a seat at the bar, where she asked for a glass of champagne while catching up with messages. It was going to be a long wait; at least the prospect of her first-class seat that turned into a bed comforted her.

She noticed that the handsome businessman seated next to her had just turned his head her way. She positioned herself to get a better look at him and tilted her head to one side, her lips pouting.

"Where are you off to?"

"I have a meeting in Manchester tomorrow morning, but that doesn't look likely to be happening now. I'm Alex, by the way," he said, offering her his hand.

She took in his chiseled face, with its dark designer stubble, admiring the way his eyes crinkled at the corners as

he smiled at her. He was exactly the type she usually lusted after. Dipping the tip of a manicured finger into her glass, she licked off the chilled champagne, putting Marco firmly out of mind.

It was almost twenty-four hours later when she finally boarded her flight to London. The delay had started to feel like a bad omen. Her mother had given her absolutely no details of her grandmother's condition; the old lady might even be dead by the time she got there. She wasn't sure she could handle her grandmother's passing away on her own.

The hushed atmosphere in the first-class cabin was soothing, with soft music playing in the background as the cabin crew went through the take-off procedures. As soon as the seat belt sign was switched off, a steward appeared with a pair of pajamas, a comforter, sheets, and another glass of champagne. He reclined her seat as she stood in the aisle. When he'd gone, she lay back, cocooned in the soft comforter. She closed her eyes, trying to stop the swimming sensation in her head. airsickness wasn't something that usually affected her. At first, she put it down to a lack of sleep, and to drinking far too much fizz, which airlines use as a panacea for all that ails their disgruntled first-class passengers. But now there were also flutters multiplying in her stomach. The nervous anticipation of what she would find, when she finally reached her grandmother's house in Worcester, was growing.